

CLAIMS

1. A method for the treatment of soft tissue comprising injecting at least one derivative of hyaluronic acid in the form of a gel in combination with a biologically or pharmacologically active component or cell into the tissue in need of treatment, wherein said hyaluronic acid derivative is selected from the group consisting of:
 - (a) benzyl ester hyaluronic acid wherein 50-75% of the carboxy groups are esterified with a benzyl radical; and
 - (b) an auto-cross-linked derivative of hyaluronic acid wherein 3-15% of the carboxyl groups of hyaluronic acid are cross-linked to the hydroxyl group of the same or different hyaluronic acid molecule.
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein said benzyl ester is one wherein 50% of the carboxy groups are esterified with a benzyl radical.
3. The method according to claim 1, wherein said mammalian cell is selected from the group consisting of chondrocytes, osteocytes, fibroblasts, keratinocytes, adipocytes, muscle cells, nerve cells, cells from the peripheral nervous system, endothelial cells, hematopoietic cells, glandular cells, cells of the urethra, stem cells and genetically modified cells, both from adult and embryo.
4. The method according to claim 3, wherein said cells are chondrocytes.
5. A method of treatment of cartilage damage which comprises injecting into the intra-articular space of a patient chondrocytes in combination with a hyaluronic acid derivative in the form of a gel, wherein said hyaluronic acid derivative is selected from the group consisting of:
 - (a) a benzyl ester of hyaluronic acid wherein 50-75% of the carboxy groups are esterified with a benzyl radical; and

(b) an auto-crosslinked derivative of hyaluronic acid wherein 3-15% of the carboxyl groups of hyaluronic acid are cross-linked to the hydroxyl group of the same or different hyaluronic acid molecules.

6. The method according to claim 5, wherein said benzyl ester is one wherein
5 50% of the carboxy groups are esterified with a benzyl radical.